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SUBJECT: UNMIK LOOKING FOR ELUSIVE CONSENSUS ON MUNICIPAL
ELECTIONS

Sensitive but unclassified; please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The SRSG and the OSCE head of office hosted an April 27 meeting of Kosovo political party representatives and interested international parties, including COM, to discuss whether Kosovo's municipal elections should take place in October 2006 as scheduled. Most political party participants, including Serb representatives, supported delaying elections until ongoing Kosovo final status talks are completed, citing a desire to include new municipalities that likely will be created as part of any final status settlement and the need to avoid a Serb boycott. Opposition parties favored holding the elections as scheduled in October. SRSG Jessen-Petersen will likely take a decision to delay the elections in the interest of an orderly final status process. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) SRSG Soren Jessen-Petersen and Jens Modvig, acting head of the Kosovo office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), chaired an April 27 meeting of representatives from 17 Kosovo political parties to discuss a possible delay in Kosovo-wide municipal elections tentatively scheduled for October. The big four ethnic Albanian parties were represented by Ramush Haradinaj (AAK), Kule Berisha (LDK), Fatmir Limaj (PDK), and Veton Surroi (ORA). Most participants favored delay in order to allow the elections to include new municipalities expected to be created as part of the final status process and in order to avoid a likely Kosovo Serb boycott. Representatives of Kosovo's two Serb parties favored delaying the elections.

¶3. (SBU) Opposition leaders Surroi and Limaj opposed delaying the elections, with Surroi arguing that holding elections as scheduled would show the world that democracy has taken firm root in Kosovo. (COMMENT. In reality the opposition is anxious for elections because they believe the passing of President Ibrahim Rugova and audits underway by Kosovo's Auditor General, which have shown fiscal irregularities, could bring into question the hold the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) enjoys over most municipal governments in Kosovo. END COMMENT.) PDK's Fatmir Limaj ultimately

conceded that the PDK would be willing to discuss the question further if a consensus for delay otherwise emerged.

¶4. (SBU) In comments to the press after the meeting, Jessen-Petersen said he would facilitate two weeks of consultations on the scheduling of the elections after which he would decide on next steps. He showed a clear preference to delay when he said he wanted to avoid "risk of distraction" during final status discussions.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT. The SRSG has the power to delay the elections by fiat. He would, of course, prefer to be "asked" by the Kosovar political parties to delay elections rather than use his extraordinary powers. None of the parties will publicly admit that democratic elections would negatively impact the final status process, and none of the Albanian parties can even hint to their constituents that the specter of a Kosovo Serb boycott is of any concern whatsoever. Nonetheless, they are all aware of the risks.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED. A Kosovo Serb elections boycott would set a negative context for the debate on Kosovo's final status the United Nations Security Council will likely be launching next fall. Jessen-Petersen will likely spend some of his considerable political capital with Kosovo Albanian political parties by asserting his authority and deciding that elections should be delayed to allow inclusion of possible new municipalities and to avoid sidetracking the final status process as negotiators campaign and perhaps are even replaced. COM has discussed the issue with the SRSG and supported his inclination to postpone. END COMMENT.

¶7. (SBU) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
GOLDBERG